

Asbestos

Asbestos is a name given to a group of minerals which break apart into very fine, strong fibers and is found worldwide in certain types of rocks. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) listed asbestos as an unsafe air pollutant in the early 1970's.

Uses of Asbestos

- Asbestos has been used to make products in the United States, and is found in many homes, factories, schools, and public buildings.
- Asbestos fibers have been used as a construction material because the fibers are not affected by heat or chemicals and do not conduct electricity.
- Asbestos has been used to insulate walls and heating pipes, to soundproof rooms, and to give many paints their texture.
- To determine if a material contains asbestos, contact the maker of the product or have it tested.

Health Effects

- The health problems linked to asbestos exposure can take from ten to forty years to appear.
- Asbestos is known to cause asbestosis, as well as cancer of the esophagus, colon, pancreas, and stomach.
- Asbestos must enter the body to be harmful. The most common way for asbestos to enter the body is inhalation of asbestos fibers.
- If asbestos is not removed properly, the fibers can pollute the air in a building for its lifetime, becoming airborne when dust is stirred up.
- Asbestos fibers can remain suspended for days or weeks once released into the air.

Asbestos Regulations

- Generally, there are no federal or state requirements for removing asbestos from individual homes.
- Neither EPA nor the state require identification or removal of asbestos from public/commercial facilities unless the asbestos is going to be disturbed.
- Asbestos regulations require that emissions be controlled during demolition and renovation projects at institutional, public, commercial, and industrial facilities.
- The EPA does require public schools (K-12) to identify asbestos materials in their buildings. Removal of the material is optional.

This fact sheet is intended as a summary of issues related to asbestos, and is not all-inclusive. To obtain additional information regarding asbestos, you may contact the Bureau of Air Quality at (803) 898-4123, access the bureau web page at <http://www.scdhec.gov/environment/baq>, or write to the following address:

*Bureau of Air Quality
S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control
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